

EHD outbreak continues to spread

An insect-borne virus linked to the deaths of white-tailed deer in nine southern Indiana counties is suspected to have spread to 32 additional counties, including five in the northern half of the state.

The Southeast Cooperative Wildlife Disease Study (SCWDS) in Athens, Ga., has confirmed the presence of EHD (epizootic hemorrhagic disease) in deer found dead in Daviess, Dubois, Gibson, Jackson, Jefferson, Perry, Pike, Posey and Warrick counties.

The SCWDS also has confirmed EHD in 14 other states.

It is the second straight year Indiana has been hit with the disease, but this year's outbreak may turn out to be one of the most severe on record.

"We've had some other big outbreaks, specifically last year, 10 years ago and 10 years before that," said Jim Mitchell, DNR deer management biologist. "I think we have it in Indiana every year, but it is unusual to be this severe, particularly since we had it last year in central Indiana."

So far, Clay is the only county affected again this year.

The DNR is awaiting results from SCWDS on test samples collected in Cass, Clark, Clay, Henry, Martin, Monroe, Orange and Wayne counties.

Other counties in which suspected EHD has been reported are Adams, Brown, Crawford, Dearborn, Delaware, Floyd, Franklin, Greene, Harrison, Jay, Jennings, Johnson, Knox, Lawrence, Madison, Morgan, Ohio, Ripley, Scott, Shelby, Spencer, Switzerland, Vanderburgh and Washington.

The disease is transmitted by biting insects called midges. EHD is not transmitted to humans and is not normally found in domestic animals, which generally contract a related disease commonly called Blue Tongue instead.

EHD poses no danger to humans from handling, processing or eating the meat of an exposed animal. Hunters should take normal precautions handling all deer. As always, deer meat should be thoroughly cooked to kill any bacteria present.

This disease should not be confused with the unrelated brain disease in deer, Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD), which has never been found in Indiana.

This year's EHD outbreak began earlier than other times in which the disease has been detected, and earlier than last fall's outbreak, which killed some west-central Indiana deer. The current dry weather provides excellent reproductive

conditions for the midge, which could result in significant deer mortality this fall in southern Indiana.

The Indiana DNR does not expect significant deer mortality in the counties where EHD hit hard last fall (Clay, Hendricks, Montgomery, Park, Putnam, Sullivan), because of the residual immunity developed by the animals that survived.

EHD causes severe, flulike symptoms, plus a high fever in deer, apparently causing those infected to seek open water to cool. Sick deer may lose their appetite, coordination and their fear of normal dangers. The animals become dehydrated and progressively weaker as the disease progresses, with mouth and eye tissue often showing a rosy or bluish color. A sick deer will be obvious to someone familiar with what a healthy deer looks like.

People in affected areas are asked not to be alarmed by sick deer but to report them to their local district wildlife biologist or conservation officer.

Additional information about EHD is available at
http://www.in.gov/dnr/deerhealth/EHD_Fact_Sheet.pdf.

District wildlife biologist phone numbers are available at
<http://www.in.gov/dnr/fishwild/huntguide1/wbiolo.htm>

Conservation officer phone numbers are available at
<http://www.in.gov/dnr/lawenfor/contact/index.html>